THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A major cut in STD rates was announced by BSNL by reducing long distance call charges beyond 500 kms. From Rs. 9 per minute to Rs. 4.80 minute from 7th March, 2003.

(c) At present there is no proposal under consideration in BSNL for reduction in the ISD rates.

(d) Does not arise in view of (c) above.

Cellular Licences

3587. SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether seven companies have applied for cellular licences for mobile phones in nine States and regions across the country;

(b) if so, the firms which have applied for;

(c) how many of them have been provided licences;

(d) what are the main conditions put forward;

(e) by when they would operate cellular services in these States/ regions; and

(f) by when other parts of the country would be fully covered by mobile phones?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN) : (a) and (b) Sir, tenders were invited for grant of 14 Licences for Cellular Mobile Telephone Service (CMTS) to fill up vacant slots in 8 Telecom Circle Service areas (Andaman-Nicobar and West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, North East, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh East and Uttar Pradesh West). The said tender was cancelled as no bid was received from any of the following 7 companies who had purchased the tender document.

(i) M/s. Bharti Cellular Ltd.

(ii) M/s. Indmobile Ltd.

(iii) M/s. Contact systems (1) Pvt. Ltd.

(iv) M/s. Idea Cellular Ltd.

(v) M/s. ESSAR Telecom Ltd.

(vi) M/s. AIRCELL Digilink India Ltd.

(vii) M/s. MAX India Ltd.

(c) to (e) Do not arise in view of (a) & (b) above.

(f) Presently 25 companies, including Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), have been granted 78 licences to provide CMTS in 23 Service Areas covering whole of the country. As per the terms and conditions of the Licence for CMTS, in the Metro City Service Areas an operator is required to cover 90% of the Service Area within one year and in the Telecom Circle Service Areas 10% of the District Headquarters within one year and 50% of the District Headquarters within three years. The Licensee is also permitted to cover any other town in a district in lieu of the District Headquarter. The choice of District Headquarters/Towns to be covered and further expansion beyond 50% District Headquarters/Towns shall lie with the Licensee depending on his business decision. There is no mandatory requirement for coverage of 100% of the Districts. However, the Government operator, namely BSNL who have been granted CMTS Licences for all Service Areas of the country, except for Delhi and Mumbai Metro City Service Areas, envisages to cover all the District Headquarters in its licensed service areas.

Software policy

3588. SHRI S. M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that NGOs have demanded an immediate meeting to resolve Government's policy favouring a particular kind of expensive and monopolistic software;

(b) if so, when such a meeting would be held;

(c) whether Government would explain the policy to reduce the vast gap coming up between the rich users of computers and the poor people;